

**RELIGION AND LEADERSHIP SKILLS DEVELOPMENT FOR GOOD GOVERNANCE AND  
NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA**

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**Abstract**

*Religion is an instrument of social control. It transforms people, guides and directs them to the good path of life. Religion is a humanizing force in human society which infuses in human beings the real human essence, attitude and qualities to be able to understand as well as do what ought to be done and avoid what ought to be avoided in the society. This paper titled "Religion and leadership skills development for governance and national development in Nigeria" seeks to examine among others, leadership crisis: An issue in Nigerian governance and national development; religion and character moulding in the society, religion and leadership skills development; religion and transformation of our national political actors; godly leadership and good governance practices; and godly leadership and national development. The paper concludes by stressing that the age-long leadership crisis undermining governance and national development in Nigeria will be a thing of the past when Christians, Muslims and traditionalist avoid religious camouflage and embrace wholeheartedly the tenets taught and upheld by their various religions. The paper recommends among others that religious leaders should be endeavour to practice what they preach and avoid sacrificing their faith and personal dignity on the alter of materialism and avarice.*

**Keywords:** Religion, Leadership, Skills, Good Governance, National Development.

**Introduction**

The role of religion in the holistic development of human beings for their meaningful contributions to political emancipation of their society and national development at large cannot be underestimated. Religion is aimed at moral, spiritual, social emotional, mental, psychological physical and intellectual development of individuals for their functional efficiency and productivity in any facet of human life. It plays a vital role any shaping and moulding the personality features of an individual (Ndung'u, 2014).

Religion deals with beliefs and practices which revolve around men's acknowledgement of the supreme and absolute power of a divine being thought to be responsible for his existence, sustenance, protection and general wellbeing, and who deserve reference and worship in return.

Adeniyi (1993) defines religion as the consciousness of one's dependence on transcendent being and the tendency to worship Him. It is a body of truths, laws and rites by which man is subordinated to the transcendent being. For Peter (1998) cited in Sulaiman (2016), religion is a system of symbols which act to establish powerful, pervasive and long lasting moods and motivations in men by formulation conceptions of a general order of existence and clothing these conceptions with such an aura of factuality that the moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic.

Religion is a system of social cohesion and a collective action and brotherhood among people in the society. It enhances man's natural endowments and activates them for his/her personal well being as well as the growth and development of the society. Men are differently endowed in the society. Some are endowed with leadership abilities, creative ideas, business skills and so on, in order to move the society forward. The above implies that religion impacts on governance and natural development through the development leadership skills among those called to lead and direct others in the society. Unfortunately, the virtues of religion in Nigeria have not always been applied in the national interest or for real personal moral development. Rather religion has been used to serve selfish or negative interest and for unleashing of terror on the society and its numerous members. When properly harnessed or utilized, religious values can help develop leadership skills in our present and future leaders for good governance and eventually national development. It is in the light of the above, that this paper seeks to examine "religion and leadership skills development for good governance and national development.

### **Conceptual Clarifications**

#### **Religion**

There is no one particular acceptable definition of the phenomenon religion. This is because it means a variety of things to different people. Gilbert (1980) defines religion as any system of values, beliefs, norms and related symbols and rituals, arising from attempt by individuals and social groups to effect certain ends, whether in this world or any future world by means wholly or partly supernatural. Aiston (1967) cited in Obioha (2009) defines religion as "the belief in an ever living God, which is in a divine mind and will, ruling universe and holding moral relations with mankind". According to Akama (1997), it is a system of beliefs and practices directed towards the ultimate concern of a society. Religion is seen by Usman (1987) cited in Nwokoye (2006) as the beliefs and practices of a people, be it an individual, a clan, village, state, continent or the world. All religious, traditions of mankind are related in foundation and purpose as they all aimed at promoting peace, unity, love and brotherhood among people. Religion propagates belief in one God, peace, harmony and tranquility in the society (Nwokoye, 2006).

#### **Leadership**

Leadership is the ability to direct and lead a group towards getting the vision or achieving a set objectives (Duru-Uremadu, 2020). Kruse (2013) cited in Duru-Uremadu (2020) defines leadership as a process of social influence, which maximizes the efforts of others towards the achievement of a goal. According to Anwar and Haider (2015), leadership is a process, by which leaders can direct, guide and influence the behaviour and work of others towards the accomplishment of a specific goal in a given situation. Koontz in Obikeze and Obi (2004) conceptualizes leadership as influencing people to follow you and to work willingly for the advancement of a common goal. It takes a charismatic leader to influence followers to work willingly and give their full cooperation to the leader, especially when the goal to be achieved is absolutely a group one which is not meant for the followers personal interest.

#### **Skills**

This is commonly described as the state or quality of being dexterous in performance, the ability to perform a particular task effectively and efficiently. The Webster's Collegiate Dictionary defines skills as

the familiar knowledge of any art or science, united with readiness and dexterity in execution or performance, in the application of the art or science to practical purposes.

### **Development**

Development means advancement, a change that would yield tremendous improvement in the overall living standard of all greater number of people in the society (Obikeze, Obi, 2004).

Rodney (1986) in Obikeze and obi (2004) sees development to imply increasing skills and capacity to do things, greater freedom, self confidence, activity, self discipline, responsibility and material well being. It is a multi-dimensional and complex phenomenon whose boundary is more blurring than distinctive.

### **Good Governance**

Good governance is a concept that is much discussed and much misinterpreted by many people in the society today. One central thing about the concept is the fact that all and sundry sees it as the key to development in any given society. Uyanga (2013) cited in Aminigo & Nwoko (2016) defines good governance as all inclusive of anything that promotes public good and growth which are achieved by the ability of the governance to adhere to the principles of accountability to the people, access to information by the people; transparency in decision-making and rules of procedural fairness.

Shaabas (2010) puts it in a more excellent form, when she remarks that good governance is the responsible and moral use of authority to manage the affairs of people at any level of social existence. The level or sphere of good governance may be community, local, state or national level of social existence (Shaaba, 2010; Aninigo & Nwoke, 2016). It is that type of governance which accords more priority attention to the yearnings of the masses than those of the ruling class.

### **National Development**

National development has become a topic issues in contemporary political; economic policies and development planning and so on. It has been conceptualized in different ways by scholars from different academic disciplines. Mezieobi (2013:29) conceptualizes national development as a process of systematic transformation of the overall social, economic, political, scientific and technological life of a nation via effective, coherent, coordinated management system, result-oriented social mobilization strategy in which the citizens actually participate and exhibit positive attitudinal commitment in the overall reconstruction process for the improved human conditions of the people.

Nweke (2003) cited by Madumere, Awusaku and Onu (2020) sees national development as a development that is characterized by the ability of a country to protect the fundamental human rights and responsibilities of its citizens and eradicate social, political economic, religious, cultural and educational instabilities in order to improve on the social living of the citizenry and culture of the society that permits the self-generating, and self-perpetuating use of the people's potential (Madumere, Awusaku & Onu, 2020).

### **Theoretical Framework**

#### **Behavioural Theory of Leadership**

This paper is anchored on the behavioural theory of leadership. The major proponent of this theory was JB Watson (1978- 1958). He was an influential American Psychologist who saw the need to embark on a systematic approach to understanding the behaviour of humans and other beings. Behavioural theory posits that leadership requires a strong personality with a well-developed positive ego and self confidence.

Theorists in this theoretical approach researched on leadership as a set of behaviours. They evaluated what successful leaders did, developed taxonomy of actions, and identified broad patterns that indicated different leadership styles. Behavioural theory also incorporates parts of Skinner's theory of behaviour modification, which takes into account the effect of reward and punishment on changing behaviour. A political leader must be able to carry the citizens along in all the policies and programmes of the government through the use of motivation and punishment. The success of a leader in any level of government is dependent on the well developed positive ego self confidence, courage and firm resolute to succeed.

### **Leadership Crisis: An Issue in Nigerian Governance and National Development**

One of the major threats to Nigerian nationhood since independence in 1960 is leadership crisis. As observed by Chinua Achebe (1983) cited in Nwokoye (2006), the Nigerian nation has been less than fortunate in its leadership. The problem plaguing its national development efforts since 1960 till date is nothing but lack of effective, visionary, competent, transparent, accountable, detribalized, democratic, selfless, God fearing leadership (Nwokoye, 2006).

As observed by Nwokeji (2018), Nigeria leadership portrait both military and civilian government were fully engulfed in the quagmire of corruption which weakened their governments and then were busy giving and receiving bribes, engaging in inflation of contracts, kick back and payment of upfront; looting public fund and abuse of public property; lodging government, government fund into their private foreign accounts; using proxy names to buy property, conversion of government land to their own. (Okolo & Akpokighe, 2014; Nwokeji, 2018). The above despicable acts smack of lack of morality and ungodliness on the path of those who should serve as role models to the masses.

In recent times, Nigerian leaders take great pleasure in the abuse of human rights of their citizens, disregard for the rule of law, court injunctions and even court verdicts on political opponents to have their ways in the fiercely competitive Nigerian political arena. The situation is becoming worst as time goes on.

Chuta (2004) adopts a pontifical and pedagogic posture when he remarks that leadership entails among others, pointing to the right direction through word and action. A leader who points to the right direction in words, but acts in a manner that contradicts his word, is a bad leader. According to him, a leader's inability to match his words with action could be a result of his moral or administrative weakness. In line with the above, observation has shown that Nigerian political leaders are both morally and administratively weak.

### **Religion and Character Moulding in the Society**

Religion is known all over the world as an agent of social change and character moulder. Central among the roles played by religion in the society is the inculcation of good moral character. Religion sees the inculcating of good moral character, God consciousness, respect for the rights of other persons in the society, obedience to constituted authority, honesty, love, tolerance, kindness, humility, devotion to duty and serve as part of its primary obligation (Awusaku, 2013).

Every religious tradition of mankind is committed to upholding doctrines, teachings and ethics which are rooted in good moral conduct, God's consciousness and love of fellow humans. They all affirm the need for forgiveness, love justice and fair dealing in our relationship with others in the society. The Bible and Qur'an have teaching and doctrines that both on many moral issues and moral qualities (Uche, 2011). Quran emphasizes truthfulness (Surah 4: 45 – 47), tolerance (Surah 10: 100; 17: 83); justice (Surah 4: 59) (Uche, 2011).

Similarly, the bible enjoins Christians to practice mercy (Proverbs 3: 3; Mathew 5: 7); Meekness or humility (Titus 3: 2) love, patience (1 Timothy 6:11). Justice (Proverbs 20: 7); truthfulness (Colossians 3:9) African traditional religion also emphasize and uphold the above teachings and values. The same is applicable to otherworld religions like Confucianism, Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, Taoism, Judaism etc. The aim of this is to mould the character of the human persons into morally competent and virtuous individual in his/her morally complex and volatile environment.

### **Religion and Leadership Skills Development**

A leader is someone who stands out from the crowd, one who lives exemplary moral life, one who is ready to sacrifice his own pleasure in order to make his people happy. Christian scripture – the bible shows examples of Jesus as a true leader when he is described as a “good Sheppard ready to lay down his life for his sheep (John 10: 14 – 15); Joseph (Gen 37: 1 – 28; 41: 1 – 52); Moses (Exodus 1, 24, 14, 24); Joshua (Joshua 1 – 15); and Deborah (Judges 4: 8). These all demonstrated exemplary, selfless sacrificial and competent leadership as a result of the fear of God in them.

Muslim's scripture – the Qur'an shows qualities which leaders should possess. Examples of such qualities include, justice, tolerance, truthfulness, honesty, courtesy, wisdom etc (Surah 10: 109) (Uche; 2011). Thus, religion transforms individuals morally and equips them with behavioural skills and capacities to lead well in their various spheres of influence. According to a web source, a requirement for leadership skills is having a natural sense of authority and feeling comfortable in a position of leadership. The following leadership skills deemed most important for moving an institution forward are highlighted.

Ability to communicate, setting a good model; readiness to take on and give up responsibility; ability to motivate the led; recognizing and fostering peoples potentials; tolerance of mistakes; flexibility; setting goals and expectations; self-reflection, authenticity ([www.michaelpage.at](http://www.michaelpage.at).) Another web source lists out seven leadership skills which it considers crucial in the day today operation of any organization. They include, motivation, delegating, positivity ability ([www.thebalancecareers.com.top-leader](http://www.thebalancecareers.com/top-leader)).

Observation shows that the above leadership skills are within the purview of teachings and ethics of major world religions. Beliefs and tenets upheld by these religions encourage adherents to develop resort creative and innovative ways of handling difficulties and challenges of life with courage and simpler virtuous hope (Brown, 1975). Religious values affect the way people make decision regarding certain issues of life. Religion thus inculcates in people the skill of making timely national decisions on personal and public matters.

Religion creates in people an inbuilt self motivating mechanism which makes them to work and pursue their set goals without discouragement. Motivation (for self and others under one) is an important virtue quality or skill necessary for a successful leadership vocation in a contemporary and complex world religion provides people with incentives for motivation, hope for a better future (positivity) and firmness of character, which are indispensable in the development of quality leadership skills.

### **Religion and Transformation of our National Political Actors**

No doubt, religion has the capacity to influence any one that comes into contact with it. Exposing our present and future political leaders to religious education will indubitably add tremendous value to their personality trait, properly mould their character to become good models, good leaders with strong knack for good governance. This is in line with the observation of Awusaku and Onu (2015) when they point out that the aim of religious education is to reform people morally and instill in them the desire to always do what is good and avoid what is bad.

Okebukola (2008) cited in Awusaku and Onu (2015) corroborates the above when he states that religion seeks to transform the world and its people and points them to God. The implication of this is that religion can transform Nigerian political actors and make them fit for democratic and development-oriented governance in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Similarly, religion can point them to God or Allah, thereby checking their political or leadership hubris, recklessness in the use of power, corruption, selfishness, looting of public treasury, abuse of human rights, oppression and dehumanization of citizens, tribalism, nepotism and sectionalism as they step into the corridors of power.

Religion instills in people respect for the rule and law, love for humanity, humility to serve and build one's nation towards greatness. As observed by Omoregbe (1996) cited in Kitause and Achunike (2013) one of the virtues taught by religion is the virtue of humility. This in a way provides man with a dimension to the idea of leadership and greatness. Both Islam and Christianity uphold the virtue of humility and service to others as a source of ascendancy to greatness.

### **Godly Leadership and Good Governance Practices**

Religion provides our political ingredients for godly leadership which ultimately culminates in good governance. Godly leadership entails, among others, leadership guided by the fear of God or Allah Godly leadership manifests itself in selfless service rather than in the exercise of authority. It is based on the principles of the fear of God (Allah) and humility (Kitause & Achunike, 2003).

Godly leadership however cannot be divorced from good governance as doing what is morally right and avoiding what morally bad before God (Allah) and the law of the land constitutes the cardinal pillar of

godly leadership. As observed by Akwara and Ojomah (2013) God delights in good governance or what others may prefer to call democratic governance as it guarantees the well being of His creatures. God governance is not just a way of enabling the society to function well, but it also recognizes human feelings and propensity to err and makes it easier for mistakes to be corrected peacefully than systems that claim absolute power.

UNDP (2007) cited in Ekundayo (2017) espouses eight attributes of good governance as follows: political participation, rule of law, transparency, responsiveness, consensus, equity and inclusiveness, efficiency and effectiveness and accountability. Other scholars add, independent judiciary, tackling corruption, respect for human rights, freedom and civil liberties (Ekundayo, 2017). Godly leadership provides congenial atmosphere that will enable the above principles or attributes of good governance to work in a country.

### **Godly Leadership and National Development**

Godliness, God-consciousness or fear of God as it may be called some religious scholars, when built into the leadership structure of a nation will invariably fast-track national development. Godly leadership is visionary, selfless, sacrificial accountable, responsible, people-oriented, democratic inclusive and goal-oriented in nature. It is that type of leadership that is seriously committed to honest and judicious use of the nation's resources for the good of the citizens and national development. The major challenge facing Nigeria's national development is bad leadership which expresses itself clearly through bad governance. Nigerian political leaders are ungodly as seen in the way they wallow in bribery and corruption with reckless abandon. This, indeed is impinging greatly on our national development efforts. Bribery and corruption not only create room for more costly public investment, low government revenues, low expenditures on operation and maintenance but also make for lower resources surpluses. This can only engender poorer economic performance (Chuta, 2004). God, however, intends to use godly leadership to restore the loss image of Nigeria and put the country back on the path of survival, progress and national development as in the case of Israelites (Awusaku, 2013).

### **Religion and its Problems in Nigeria**

Religion, though, plays enormous role in leadership skills development, which contribute immensely to good governance and national development is fraught with a plethora of problems in Nigeria. One of the problems facing religion as practiced in Nigeria, is the pervasive nature of corruption and materialism in the country. Corruption and materialism have spread to every nook and cranny in the country including Churches, Mosques, Shrines of powerful deities, prayer houses and ministries and so on. Many religious leaders are now victims of corrupt practices, fraud, avarice and materialism. This makes their teachings and preaching-to have infinitesimal binding effect on their numerous adherents.

Religious terrorism poses a threat to the role played by religion in Nigeria especially in Northern part of the country ravaged by activities of the Islamic extremists sect, Boko Haram. Another problem facing religion in Nigeria is the contest for supremacy and competition between the two great religions in the country-namely Christianity and Islam. Their competition and struggle as to which religion will command higher national influence in many parts of the country.

### **Conclusion**

Religion is very important in human life as it contributes hugely to the holistic development of the individuals in the society, to make them useful to themselves and also to their communities at large. Religion is a promoter as well as a developer of leadership skills, traits and qualities such as creativity, respect for the rule of law, humility, positivity, motivation, firmness of character and other skills required by individuals for meaningful contribution to good governance and national development. Leadership crisis has been the bane of Nigeria national development striving since her independence in 1960. The country has not been fortunate in having a God fearing leader who would ready to sacrifice his person interests in favour of the interests of the masses. This is may be blamed on inability of Christians, Muslims and other religious groups to fully explore the moral values of their religions for personal transformation and general well being. The

age-long leadership crisis undermining governance and national development in Nigeria will be a thing of the past when Christians, Muslims and traditionalists avoid religious camouflage and embrace wholeheartedly the tenets taught and upheld by their religions.

### **Recommendations**

The paper makes the following recommendation as the way forward;

1. Christians, Muslims and traditionalists in Nigeria should cultivate habit of mutual cooperation and the idea of working together for the good of the country. Inter-religious conflicts should be resolved through inter-religious dialogue and not through violence or war.
2. Religious education should be made compulsory subject in primary, secondary and tertiary levels of education in Nigeria.
3. Choice of political leadership in the country should be based on the character and pedigree of the candidates contesting for elective offices and not on their personal wealth and intimidating academic credentials.
4. Religious leaders should endeavour to practice what they preach and avoid sacrificing their faith and personal dignity on the altar of materialism and avarice.

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